

Why vehicle emission testing?

The federal Clean Air Act spells out air quality standards that all areas of the United States must meet. Motor vehicles are one of the major causes of air pollutants in metropolitan areas. Vehicle exhaust emissions include nitrogen oxide, carbon monoxide and hydrocarbons. Vehicle testing assures that in-use vehicle emissions are within specified standards.

Why is emission testing required in southeastern Wisconsin?

Southeastern Wisconsin is one of over 90 metropolitan areas in 35 states with air pollution levels higher than federal health standards. Approximately one-third of the volatile organic compounds (mostly hydrocarbons) and 60% of carbon monoxide present in this area are created by motor vehicles.

The purpose of the Wisconsin Vehicle Inspection Program (VIP) is to identify:

- vehicles that exceed exhaust and evaporative emissions
- prevent registration until vehicles meet emission standards

Who sets emission standards?

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) sets the emission standards for vehicles. DMV administers the Vehicle Inspection Program.

What vehicles require testing?

Emission tests are required on automobiles and on trucks with a manufactured gross vehicle weight rating of 10,000 pounds or less which are customarily kept in the southeastern Wisconsin counties of Kenosha, Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Sheboygan, Racine, Washington and Waukesha. Exceptions are vehicles manufactured before 1968, diesel-powered vehicles, and motorcycles. Approximately 700,000 tests are performed each year.

Who does the testing and what does it cost?

The DMV contracts with Envirotech Systems Corporation to conduct testing. The DMV audits test equipment at each station weekly to assure accurate testing. The required test is without direct charge to the motorist.

When are vehicles tested?

Vehicles are tested biennially based upon vehicle model year. The testing is required at the time of vehicle registration renewal. Renewal notices indicate if testing is required.

Additionally, vehicles more than 5 model years old are required to be tested at the time of change of ownership. DMV mails a letter outlining the testing requirements to the new owner.

Where are vehicles tested?

There are 12 vehicle inspection test facilities located throughout southeastern Wisconsin with 44 test lanes.

How is the test performed?

When motorists enter the test facility, the lane inspector asks for the registration renewal notice and enters essential information into a computer. The computer automatically selects the proper standards for the vehicle's weight and model year.

The emissions are measured while the vehicle is driven on a treadmill-like device called a dynamometer. The vehicle is operated over a driving cycle at various speeds which resemble typical city driving patterns including acceleration and deceleration. The vehicle's gas cap is also tested to ensure that it seals properly.

Vehicles with a model year 1996 and newer receive an on-board diagnostic (OBDII) test, which checks the vehicle's on board diagnostic system rather than measuring tailpipe emissions.

After the emission inspection, motorists receive results on a computer-generated report form. This report contains the results of the emissions test and the gas cap inspection.

When vehicles pass the vehicle inspection, the owner may complete the registration by mail, at the emission test facility, or in person at a DMV Service Center. The computer automatically matches test records from the inspection stations with the DMV's registration records to verify inspection compliance.

What happens to vehicles which fail?

If a vehicle fails any portion of the test, the owner must have emission-related repairs performed and/or replace the gas cap prior to being retested. Satisfactory completion of the test requirements is necessary before vehicle registration renewal. The inspector provides all motorists with an informational brochure at the initial failed test to explain the repair and retest process.

For more information contact:

Bureau of Vehicle Services
Motor Vehicle Inspection Section
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(800) 242-7510